

REMARKS

In the Office Action dated November 7, 2005, the Examiner stated that claims 17-20 were allowed and that claims 6, 8, 14 and 16 would be allowable if rewritten in independent form incorporating all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims. Claims 1, 2, 9 and 10 were rejected under § 102(b) as being anticipated by Japan '292. Claims 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 12 and 13 were rejected under § 103(a) as being obvious over Japan '292 in view of Geldhof et al.

By the present amendment, applicants have clarified independent claims 1 and 9, and therefore the rejections of the Examiner of claims 1-16 is respectfully traversed. A correction to the dependencies of claims 8 and 16 has also been made.

The present invention is directed to a drive mechanism for an automatic washer in which there is a first drive shaft driven by a motor at a first rotational speed and with a first torque. A second drive shaft is arranged to rotatingly drive the agitator, by means of a mechanism, at a second rotational speed and a second torque. Two clutches are provided. A first clutch is arranged between the wash basket and the first drive shaft to allow for selective engagement and disengagement between the wash basket and the first drive shaft. This allows for the basket to be rotated at the speed of the first drive shaft when the clutch is engaged. The second clutch is arranged between the wash basket and the second drive shaft to allow for selective engagement and disengagement between the wash basket and the second drive shaft. As explained in the specification at paragraph [0024], the second clutch may be engaged when the first clutch is disengaged to allow the wash basket to rotate at the speed of the second drive shaft, and in the example described, to thus permit a relatively slow rotation of the wash basket as the agitator is rotated, in order to swirl the clothes in the wash basket to provide a gentle washing action. In order to clarify the claims, claims 1 and 9 have been amended to specify that the second clutch will allow for the wash basket to rotate with the second drive shaft when the wash basket is disengaged from the first drive shaft, but engaged with the second drive shaft.

The Japanese '292 reference does not teach the two clutches as claimed in present claims 1 and 9. The Examiner asserts that elements 9 and 18 of the Japanese '292 reference comprise clutches, however, provides no translation that supports this assertion. The translated abstract does not identify any clutches, but instead merely describes a normal arrangement where the "rotary blade" (agitator) can be rotated at a slow speed and the "dewatering tub" (wash basket) can be rotated at a high speed. There is no provision disclosed for rotating the wash basket to rotated with the second drive shaft when the wash basket is disengaged from the first drive shaft, especially to allow the basket to rotate at a relatively slow speed. In fact, the Japanese '292 reference specifically teaches away from such an arrangement in that it is specifically stated that the "top end of the rotary case is projected in the outer tub and fixed to the dewatering tub." The rotary case described is the ring gear of the planetary gear system, and with the dewatering tub fixed to the ring gear will cause the wash basket to rotate at the full speed of the first drive shaft if the pressure of the brake strap 26 is released with the wash basket disengaged from the first drive shaft. If the basket begins to rotate at all, such as due to friction of the clothes and water in the basket, this will cause the ring gear to rotate, thereby increasing the speed of the planetary gear carrier which the agitator is connected to. This will cause the ring gear to rotate faster in an attempt to "catch up" to the speed of the planetary gear carrier (agitator speed), until the agitator is moving at the speed of the sun gear and first drive shaft, and all of the gears are locked together, as occurs when the first clutch is engaged.

In the planetary gear arrangement described as a preferred embodiment of the invention, at paragraph [0024] of the present specification, the spin tube 40 is not connected to the gear housing 50 and is therefore free to rotate relative thereto, allowing for the swirling action of the relatively slowly rotating agitator and wash basket.

The amendment to independent claims 1 and 9 clarifies that the wash basket will be allowed to rotate with the second drive shaft when the wash basket is disengaged from the first

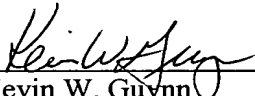
drive shaft, but engaged with the second drive shaft, thereby resulting in the described slow swirling action rather than the high speed (water extracting) rotation provided by Japanese '292.

Therefore, for at least these reasons, applicants respectfully submit that independent claims 1 and 9, and each of their dependent claims 2-8 and 10-16 are patentable over Japanese '292.

The teachings of Geldhof et al are relied on by the Examiner only for the teachings of a splined connection between the second drive shaft and the agitator. Geldhof et al does not provide any of the missing teachings relative to the limitations of claims 1 and 9, and therefore, applicants respectfully submit that the additional teachings of Geldhof et al are insufficient to render any of claims 1-17 obvious when combined with Japanese '292.

In view of the amended claims submitted herewith and the explanatory comments above, applicants respectfully submit that the rejections set forth by the Examiner have each been addressed and overcome. Applicant requests the Examiner to reconsider the rejections and to indicate all of the claims as allowed.

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